The Angel And The One

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The Angel And The One

by ghostgirl (loveindefinitely)

Summary

Prince Will Graham, Beta heir to the Kingdom of Cervus, finds that the future that he had once planned for is as delicate as the nation's political climate. With the looming threat of a war between the nation's Kingdoms, Cervus' regent, Jack Crawford, tasks Will with the duty of a lifetime.

He would be wed to King Hannibal Lecter -- the infamously dishonourable leader of the Diabolus Kingdom -- in a supposed symbol of peace between the near-warring states. Although, the peace would be just that; a symbol. Will would work as a spy in the innermost circle of the Diabolus, reporting back to Crawford and his kingdom at large.

However, as Will's once tenuous relationship with the charismatic Alpha starts to sweeten, his heart is pulled in two directions. The choice between lineage and love must be made, and the consequences could crumble not only Will, but the nation as a whole.

Francesca

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will Graham knew, from the moment he could *know,* that his place in this world was a symbolic one.

His interests didn't matter, not in the scheme of things, and neither did his preferences. His passions, his intrigues, his *wants*; neither here nor there, merely aesthetic things that little mattered.

No, his *meaning* was rooted very much in the crown of which would one day sit atop his curls, however stained it would become by the time it was his. He was a Prince, first and foremost, and his purpose was to fulfil the duties of that role to its fullest. Protect his Kingdom, and its people, and his lineage. Be the perfect heir.

It's rare that Will wishes for a different fate, but at this very moment, it's difficult *not* to.

His posture is stiff in the wooden chair he's sat in, sweat clinging to his frame like a second-skin. The large, stained-glass window decorates the room in spots of colour, the late-afternoon sun glaring where it sits in the Autumn sky.

It should be beautiful.

It *would* be, if any other conversation was taking place, and Will was anyone but himself.

Mouth dry, tongue heavy where it sits behind his teeth, he manages, "Is there any other option at hand? Any other way to go about this, my Lord?"

The air is stiff in the War Room, the humidity stifling due to the early morning rain. The two opposing scents of the King and his Regent do little to help, either. Both Alphas having such strong, dominating scents makes it an altogether unpleasant place for Will to be in.

Jack Crawford – a large, stern man, with a scent akin to tobacco burning against mint – folds his hands over the blackwood table, leaning over in an attempt to meet Will's downturned gaze. When he fails, he simply shakes his head, attempting at a sense of sympathy he doesn't seem capable of.

"If there was another way, Your Highness, we would undertake it in a heartbeat," he states, voice low and verging on stubborn. "If anything, this may just be the key to absolving this impending war."

Will highly doubts that. With the Kingdoms at such disarray, the threat of war could hardly be called that. It was more a fact than anything, the only unknown being the nature of the calamity that would mark its start date.

“This is your *duty*, William,” the King’s heavy eyes narrow, the grey bushes of his brows forming harsh angles. His scent sharpens to that of smoke, and it feels rough against Will’s taste buds.

Will’s father has always been a formidable figure, even so nearing the end of his reign. A heavy-handed Alpha, sure and entirely set in his ways, even knowing the anguish it causes his sole son. Uncaring of the consequences, as long as they sided in his image of his Kingdom’s legacy.

Searching his mind for faults, for any sort of hole in this admittedly frightening plan, Will asks, “And the King is aware of my gender? Surely he’d want an Omega spouse?”

“He can take up a concubine if he so desires,” the King brushes off, either unaware or uncaring of Will’s flinch at the statement. “King Lecter is well aware of your *gender,* and has told us that he cares little for any children. Odd, but we are in no place to complain.”

Odd, indeed, Will thinks. For an Alpha King to not want any heirs at all is, all things considered, unheard of. The thought stresses at the Prince’s mind, along with the myriad of other issues surrounding this sudden and dangerous arrangement.

“Will there be a celebration?” Will asks, weary, exhaustion settling deep into his bones. “To inform the public of the unity?”

Jack and the King share a quick glance, and Will’s hands tighten on his cloth-covered thighs. His knuckles stain a startling white, and Will watches it spread, the splits of them beading slightly with new drops of blood. He’d need to wash them after the sparring match he’d had earlier.

“There will be a dinner, with this court’s closest circle. The King and three of his closest advisors have been invited. The signing will occur then, but the public will not be informed until you are well on your way to Diabolus.”

A shiver startles down Will’s spine at that, akin to a spider’s legs trailing down his sweat-soaked skin. He pulls his lower lip between his teeth, mind working at a thousand miles per minute.

His next question will send him to an early grave, he’s sure of it, but he asks anyway. “When is this dinner planned for?”

Jack settles into his chair, his clean-shaven jaw setting as he finally manages to meet Will’s sorrowful blue eyes. “Tomorrow evening, when the sun first embraces the horizon.”

And, oh, what a pitiful thing that is.

Standing on shaky legs, Will’s chair scrapes against the wooden floorboards, the Beta flinching at the sound. He takes a step back, and then another, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallows against the tightening of his throat.

He bows, an uneasy thing, and mutters to the floor, “I believe I should wash up, my Lord, my King. Please excuse me.”

Making his way out of the room, shutting the heavy door behind him, Will finds his legs taking him down the hallway towards his quarters with quick, startled steps. His boots echo against the shined, oak floorboards, the high ceiling allowing the sound to reverberate.

It’s desolate, except for the spare servant or maid, each with their own chores or goal. Hallway tables, decorated with flowers or urns or a number of trinkets, abate the unlived feeling of the castle. Oil paintings of familial figures and the sorts, too, decorate the white walls, memories of previous Kings and the likes.

Will can’t enjoy any of it, not like how he once did, with the bustling thoughts invading his mind.

He would be wed, he thinks, heart thundering and pulse quickening. *He would be wed to the single most feared man of the Continent, of the* nation, *his life being forfeited for the sake of millions.*

He knows, he *swears* he does, how important this duty is for him to fulfil. He could save the entire Kingdom as he knows it, and all he has to do is grin and bear it. Even if that means bearing hands around his throat, or a knife to his gut, or any multitude of untimely fates.

It’s his destiny, he reminds himself. Always has been, always will.

Stepping foot into his quarters feels like a bucket of cool water against his nape, and as he closes the door behind him, he finds himself sliding to the floor against it, bottom hitting the rug and the back of his skull resting against the wood.

He closes his eyes, spots starting against the backs of his eyelids as he exhales, deep and unsure. It feels as if an invisible noose of anxiety has been fastened around his throat, and every breath has been shortened due to the rope.

Thoughts flood his mind, unbearable ones, such as a death before he even steps foot into the brutish Diabolus Kingdom, or an unhappy future filled with a different form of abuse to that he’s been made used to.

“Your Highness!” A familiar, startled voice calls, rushed steps and a scent of licorice following the alarmed title. “What’s happened?”

Despite himself, despite his *ridiculous* situation, Will’s full lips tilt into a soft smile, and his eyes open.

Before him stands his valet, brows furrowed as he looks over the Prince, surprised and uneasy at his dishevelled state. It was rare for Will to appear so disheartened, and that fact alone has the man’s stomach dropping.

“Matthew, you know what I’ve said about that title,” Will softly chastises. Even after over a decade with his valet, the man only called him by his given name if no one else was within

hearing distance.

Accepting his valet's extended hand, Will stands once more, his smile dropping to a frown as he rubs his hands over his face, palms digging into his eyes. The world seems greyer, somehow, suddenly turned monotone by a single conversation. A single change of fate.

"I am to be wed," Will manages, and almost chuckles despite himself as Matthew's mouth falls open in abrupt shock. "And you'll never guess to *whom.*"

Hand moving to Will's shoulder, Matthew urges him to the attached washroom, the frosted window allowing the room to be draped in golden light. It's quite pretty, all things considered, with the tulips sat on the lip of the tub being highlighted so wonderfully.

"Pray tell," Matthew winces, loosening the two buttons of Will's white tunic with ease.

Holding his arms out, being swept into the familiarity of the position, Will admits, "The King of Diabolus himself."

Pausing his movements, with only one sleeve pulled off of Will's muscled shoulder, Matthew's eyes widen almost incredulously. It helps with the Prince's mood, feeling not so entirely alone in the feeling. It's only when Matthew continues, silent, that Will adds, "Tomorrow evening, 'when the sun first embraces the horizon'."

Without a word, Matthew turns the handle, boiled water flooding the tub and filling the enclosed room with steam. It loosens Will's body, he finds, and he releases a short breath.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Matthew manages, voice laced with genuine sympathy. Something Will hadn't managed to receive from either of the men who had handed him his fate. "I've heard… *awful* things about His Majesty."

"Pray tell," Will chuckles despite himself, despite everything, a direct mimic of his valet's previous words. With the final piece of cloth taken from his body, Will manoeuvres himself into the now-full tub, relaxing into the near unbearable heat with ease. The spikes of pain along his skin help his internal struggles, in a way he is entirely too grateful for.

"I'm unsure if you wish to know," Matthew admits, voice soft, a bucket full of steaming water and a rag in hand. He settles onto the tiles next to the tub, kneeling as he begins to scrub gently at the arm Will's left hanging over the edge.

Will meets his valet's eyes with sincerity, mouth pressing into a firm line. "I'd rather be made aware of his position in society now, than at his mercy."

It's a frightening truth, a devastating one, but the kind that must be acknowledged.

Will knew very little about King Hannibal Lecter, in fact, he could recall only three things about the foreboding man. One, he was an Alpha. Two, he was ruthlessly cunning, knowing his way around both a sword and one's mind. And three.

He was, as Will had heard whispered amongst the maids and Lords' daughters, a devastatingly attractive and intelligent man. So much so, that one had to keep their wits about

them, lest they get sucked into his deep and intelligent stares and words. That singular fact had Will more on edge than any of the others.

The Prince was far from a stupid man; even at twenty-six years of age, he was quicker than most of the wiser Lords, and he was lethal when given a weapon.

Sword or not, he knew he could come out of a fight using his wits alone.

Even the mere concept of having an opponent who both outranked him in status and smarts gripped him in a sense of fear. He had to be prepared for attacks on his person at any given time, during his stay at Diabolus, however long.

“It’s hearsay,” Matthew warns, beginning to scrub shampoo into the curls at the back of Will’s head, the sensation soothing his tightened muscles and allowing the Prince to settle further into the soapy water. “But I’ve heard of many a rumour surrounding His Majesty’s death toll.”

That sparked Will’s keen interest in an instant. “Do elaborate,” he encouraged gently.

“It’s been said that His Majesty will strike even his *valet* straight through the gut if they displease him in any way. There’s a particular story surrounding his younger sister, and her untimely death. It was always recorded as a natural death, but…” Matthew trails off, not wanting to elaborate on such an improper rumour.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Will attempts to keep his anxiety at bay, but it’s a difficult task considering the circumstances. Rumours were always to be taken with more than a singular grain of salt, he was well aware, but even *they* had to come from some sense of truth, however trivial.

“His Majesty’s also been said to have only taken one Omega into his bed,” the valet continues, beginning to pour a glass of water over Will’s bountiful curls, continuing the process of tending to the Beta. “It’s almost a game amongst the Lords’ heirs of age to attempt to enter his bed. They’re always denied, without a reason or any remorse. Quite odd for an unwedded Alpha King, isn’t it, Will? The man has only just celebrated his Thirty-Fourth birthday.”

“It is indeed,” Will murmurs, registering the fairly light age-gap. It’s certainly better than he’d hoped, knowing of some of the unfortunate and disappointing differences in age between certain royal couples. Eight years was, considering, not much difference between them at all.

The sunlight has started to dim, evening taking over the golden afternoon, the bathroom darkening. It’s a period of time Will has always found comfort in, the fading between afternoon and night.

“I’m sure they’re just rumours made by bored housewives and maids,” Matthew is quick to comfort, finishing off his clean and looking to Will with a soothing understanding. “Your father – er, His Majesty – wouldn’t simply send you to your death. There is reason behind this all, I’m sure.”

“Thank you, Matthew,” Will sighs, a smile finally returning to his graceful features. “I am not defenceless, and I’m certain that even His Majesty wouldn’t be so foolish as to kill Cervus’ single heir.”

His valet doesn’t look so convinced, but he nods anyway, and stretches out a towel for Will to be wrapped into as the Prince steps out of the tub.

It isn’t until minutes later, with Will dressed once more into suitable nightwear and sitting upon his neat bed, that it hits him. Truly hits him.

He looks around at his room – the room that had always, *always* been his – and tears spring to his eyes. The high roof, decorated with a mural he’d spent every night looking upon until slumber overtook him. His furniture, his bed, every little trinket and every memory attached to every corner.

All of it will be gone. His entire *life* will be gone, by tomorrow evening, with little fanfare and little warning.

Everything he’d ever had. Just. *Poof.*

And it hurts, he finds, with Matthew off gathering staff to begin packing his things. It hurts so badly, it’s as if a hunting dagger has hit every artery within his lithe body and *twisted,* gathering nerve and ligament and muscle with its teeth.

He’d always known that, someday, he’d have to be married. Either to an Omegan wife or an Alpha husband, sex not mattering in the slightest. His father didn’t care all too much for an heir, knowing that the monarchy was dwindling, and parliamentary affairs were becoming more favoured amongst the people. Knowing that *Will* had always been immensely favoured by the people, and knowing that he’d have his own print on the Kingdom’s legacy.

It’s easier to think of his Father in a past tense, Will finds, knowing what his Father has sent him to. All too aware of the pig that’s been made of himself, and the slaughterhouse of which he’ll meet his end.

Will was rarely allowed in the War Room at all, in fact, his father preferring he remain his focus on issues and affairs considering the villages and people, instead of national ones. When he’d been summoned to such a place, he’d known stepping into the Room would alter his life in any multitude of ways. *Known* the effect it would likely have on him.

But he hadn’t. He hadn’t *realised,* not truly, just how awful that ‘effect’ was going to be.

He isn’t aware that the tears have fallen down his cheeks until they stain his trousers in small dots, silent as they hit the brown cloth. Wiping carelessly at his soft, pinkened cheeks, he lets out a breathy sound of protest.

His duty, he thinks, despite it all, *This is his duty.*

It was his *duty* to be wedded to a notoriously evil man. It was his *duty* to cater to the King’s every whim. It was his *duty* to be a symbol. Be that one of peace or prosperity or lineage.

It did not matter if his interests lied in the good of his own people, and his own happiness. It did not matter if his passions lied in the river down the hill, and the desk at which he twined wood and feathers to create lure. It did not matter if he enjoyed the company of his valet, and he was the single person he felt comfortable with.

It did not matter because he was a Prince, and he had a duty, and little else was of any such importance.

The single lantern placed on the shelving next to his bed dances in the soft breeze, the fire within sparking every so often. It helps stabilise Will and his thoughts, his heavy breaths lightening with every twitch of the small flame.

“It is my duty,” Will whispers to himself, a verbal reminder. He closes his eyes for a second, blissfully ignorant to the world for a single moment, before he looks upon the lantern once more. “I will save as many lives as I am able.”

When he looks away from the flame, it’s with a new sense of determination and strength.

Even if, Gods forbid, his soon-to-be lawfully wedded Husband is to attempt an attack on the Prince’s life, he will not go down without a fight. Will Graham is simultaneously physically and mentally strong, and he will not be an easy hit, however his Father had advertised him.

He is a fucking *Prince of his people*, and if he can save even just one of their lives from this impending war, then he will do it with gritted teeth and a fire in his eyes.

It is his *duty.*

It’s an entirely odd feeling, eating breakfast for the last time as a bachelor.

The eggs taste almost rotten against his tongue, the sourdough suddenly too tough and chewy. Not at all a fault to the chefs, Will’s aware, but a fault to the impending doom his life now foresees.

Matthew, for his credit, does his best to cheer Will up. He makes jokes, gives the Beta that all too familiar smile, and hopes that it does something to lift his mood. It doesn’t do much, considering the dire situation at hand, but it’s the thought that counts.

With every bite, Will feels as if it’s a step closer to his demise. His meal is a short one, and he feels guilty for not being able to finish it off. When he offers the leftovers to Matthew, however, he feels a bit better.

Their relationship has always been a close one, the closest thing either’s ever had to a best friend. At least, it was like that in close quarters – whenever around other staff or people at all, Matthew was quick to adjust his posture and attitude to that of servitude.

“Make sure that the hounds are properly treated and cared for,” Will manages, arms folded over his chest as he watches Matthew eat. “I don’t want them to get abused without my guidance or watch.”

Matthew’s large brown eyes soften at that, understanding filling them to the brim. The Prince was always especially fond of the creatures, caring for them almost more than he did for the people within his Castle. It always gained him respect amongst the noblewomen, but upturned noses from the Lords.

“Of course, Will,” the valet nods, his tone dampened by the weight of the day. “I will personally attend to it.”

“Thank you,” the Prince murmurs, soft and forlorn. He won’t cry, he knows – had spent the time before last night’s slumber with his head in his pillow and flooding it with salty water. He doubted he could now, even if he tried.

“Everything’s packed,” the valet adds, “While you were on your morning ride, your room was cleaned out with all of your things. You will be quite comfortable at your new home, I should hope.”

“As comfortable as one can be,” Will mutters, brows furrowing against his delicate features. “I do wish I could take you. It would help immensely.”

Outstretching his hand boldly, Matthew rests his warm hand over Will’s clammy one, a soft frown on the valet’s face. “This won’t be the last time we’ll see each other, Will, I am sure of it.”

“I do hope so, Matthew,” Will manages a weak grin, one of which his valet returns.

A heavy knock sounds against the door, and the two flinch away from each other as if they’ve both been prodded.

The room they’re sitting in is traditionally a tea room, but one the two find to be of good use when wanting a meal away from others. The only problem, being that *anyone* knows where to find them, should Will not be with his Father at a meal.

Pushing the plate back to Will, Matthew hastily and silently pushes the other chair back into the table, and moves to stand at the wall with his hands held behind his back.

The door opens to Jack Crawford, who gives a barely passable bow before stepping into the room. His eyes lock onto Matthew, before his brows narrow and he stiffly asks, “May I speak to His Highness in private?”

Even though his tone marks it as a question, it’s anything but. With a quick, concerned glance to Will, he inclines his head and walks past Jack and into the hallway.

When the Regent clicks the door shut behind him, Will knows that it’s going to be a conversation he wants no part in.

The single window in the room takes up the entire back wall, viewing into the Castle's beautiful gardens and displaying the white walls and table in cascades of morning sunlight. It's usually stunning, but Jack's presence and the overall mood of the day dampens it.

"If this is –"

"You are going to be given unfiltered access to Diabolus' inner circle," the Regent interrupts, expression stubborn and scent tinged with anger. "I'm talking about information regarding the possibility of war, the workings of Lecter's Kingdom, and a multitude of other things I needn't explain. You know what I'm getting at, Your Highness."

Rising from his chair and tightening his fingers around the sleeves of his white tunic, he levels Jack with an incredulous look. "You wish for me to *double-cross* His Majesty?"

"I wish for you to save millions of lives!" He booms, pointing a large and weathered hand to the window, and by proxy, the gardeners working amongst the crops, and further still, the villages. "This is something that could *save our Kingdom*."

"Risking my life by being bound to his side is sacrifice enough," Will struggles out, eyes widening and muscles burning with the need to *fight.* "For me to work as a *spy* is a death sentence!"

"You have never been one to adhere to rumours," Jack narrows his gaze, "And let alone be frightened into servitude by them! You have been raised with the means to fight, Your Highness, so *fight for this Kingdom."*

"I have been taught how to fight with my fists and my words, my Lord, not by seduction and eavesdropping!" Will seethes, taking an unsteady step back, arms splayed wide in disbelief. "My agreeing to this union is due to duty alone, but this is underhanded at best. I *refuse*."

"By refusing, you admit to having your hand in the potential deaths of millions. Of mothers and children and the Lords of whom you eat beside. The fault will be laid beneath *your* feet, Your Highness, and you will live with that regret for years to come, should you survive them."

Will swallows around the pain in his throat, past the pit in his stomach, and when he meets Jack's eyes, his resolve crumbles. The genuine *fury* and inability to *understand* Will's plight shatters him, and the threat of taking any such part in the deaths of his people has his head bowing.

"How will I even report to you, my Lord? My correspondence is sure to be heavily monitored," Will bites, only the undercurrent of disrespect betraying his thinly veiled anger.

"There shall be a festival in three months' time, of which we have already been invited to," Jack waves, "That will give us all enough time to prepare for any possible attacks, and for you to gather any necessary information."

"Three months," Will breathes, shaking his head and raising it once more, "Three *months* is far too long of a time! The war may begin before your arrival!"

“And if it does, we will be *prepared*,” Jack demands, no give in his words as he stares down the Prince, no hint of fear in his dark eyes. “You are to record any information that could at all be useful, and report to us come the time of the Festival. That is final, Your Highness.”

“I’m sure the King has been made aware of this plan?” Will slumps back into his chair, arms resting against his spread knees and shoulders risen against his ears.

“He inspired the idea,” Jack admits, standing down with the Beta before him’s defeat.

Will’s words are weak as he says, “I will do as you please, my Lord. Please allow me some reprieve before tonight’s dinner.”

It isn’t until Jack inclines his head and the door closes once more that Will buries his face in his hands, rubbing against his smooth skin with dismay and upset.

The daggers push deeper, and twist once more.

“Is all of this really necessary?” Will asks on a sigh, watching as two of his less familiar maids fuss with his brunette curls, styling it with a number of different products the Prince couldn’t put a name to, let alone a use. “I have little interest in impressing such a bastardly man.”

“I really shouldn’t have spoken about such rumours,” Matthew spoke, looking through Will’s measly jewellery box for any accessories that would bring out his masculine beauty. “It’s gotten you unnecessarily riled.”

“It’s prepared me for the likelihood of marrying a man of whom I have little interest or respect for,” Will corrects, wincing when one of the maids pulls on his curls a little too tightly. He huffs. “I will do well to refuse any place in his bed, or turn my back on him in any capacity. A man with such a reputation has little place in winning over my affections.”

“Your reputation is only positive because of the frame of reference,” Matthew looks over to the uncomfortable Prince. “When the people around you are looked upon so unfortunately, it brightens your otherwise mediocre traits.”

Rolling his eyes with a barely suppressed smirk, Will comments, “Does that include you?”

“I’m hardly of such an importance to even *have* a reputation, Your Highness,” Matthew chuckles, eyeing a singular silver ring, adorned with a deep blue sapphire.

“Oh, you look *lovely,* Your Highness,” one of the maids pats his shoulders, the last of the product used to sweep one of his front curls away from his face. She places a hand over her breast, admiring her work in the vanity’s mirror, the other maid moving to pack up the supplies. “Truly devastating.”

The lack of scents, apart from Matthew's Omegan one, settles Will's nerves immensely. The two Beta maids make quick work of clearing the supplies, before one grabs another, smaller bag.

"What else must be done before I dress?" Will asks, a low tremor threatening his voice. With every tick of the clock, he finds himself one moment closer to his doom, and that fact alone has anxiety once more threatening a hold around him.

The maids share a look, before the meeker one explains, "*Cosmetics,* Your Highness. If we highlight your blue eyes with hints of black around them, it'll make them *much* more enchanting. It's sure to stun your Husband."

Husband. The term sets the Prince's nerves aflame, bringing his fears once more to the forefront.

He doesn't manage to say anything, so he merely gives them both a short nod, closing his eyes when instructed. It's surprisingly quick, the brush of a finger underneath his lower lashes, and one more over his upper eyelid.

When he opens his eyes once more to the mirror, he has to do a double-take.

They were both right, of course, the black powder creating a stark contrast with his bright blue eyes. It makes him look… not *devastating,* as they had said, Will had never been one for vanity. But more dangerous, in a way. Compelling.

"Gods," Matthew breathes, and when Will meets his eyes, his cheeks brush with pink. "I only mean, Your Highness, that they were entirely correct. His Majesty will adore you at first sight."

"I should sure hope not," Will huffs, looking away. "If I can manage with barely a glance from the man, I will be blessed."

"You really don't wish to enter a happy relationship with His Majesty?" Matthew softly inquires, simultaneously hopeful and devastated. "You're not even going to attempt peace?"

Shaking his head, careful not to ruin the maids' hard work, Will answers, "I wish to only speak with the man when necessary, and even then, with haste and scant affection. If we can manage to be just above enemies, I will be most pleased."

It wasn't just Matthew's repeatings of the rumours that caused Will to hold such a steady dislike for the stranger, but his pre-existing knowledge of Alphas as a whole. They were entirely overbearing, abusive things, and Will wanted little to do with one in any capacity. The Lords he was surrounded with were already too much for the Prince, he found, and he had little care for holding any interest in one beyond professional.

Matthew doesn't answer, but he does move to the near-emptied wardrobe, pulling out Will's undershirt, gesturing for him to move over to be dressed.

With each article of clothing, Will finds he loses a sense of hope. The breeches remove his hope for any sort of romance like the ones told in the novels he managed to secretly get a hold of. The waistcoat removes his hope for a life within his Castle's walls.

By the time he's fully dressed, he finds himself utterly drained of emotion, except for that of a burning distaste for the men who took part in this stripping of choice, duty or not.

Matthew gently urges him to the full-length mirror, and when he does, Will looses a shaky sigh.

His signature flowy, white tunic remains, but atop it, rests a waistcoat of deep emerald, shining with embroidered swirls and intricate designs. It's entirely unlike his usual garb, consisting of loose shirts and leather breeches, meant for a villager more so than a Prince.

This. This outfit is meant for the heir to the Cervus throne. The image doesn't sit well in Will's stomach in the slightest.

The black, fitted breeches lead to shining black boots, barely worn in. All in all, it makes him look regal – expensive in a way he isn't particularly fond of. Matthew's eyes meet him in the mirror, and the valet's voice is dipped in sorrow when he asks, "Are you ready?"

Will swallows. Thinks of his duty and symbol in this world.

"Not at all. Lead the way."

Chapter End Notes

AHHHH okay. so. im so excited to share this silly lil fic with you all!!! i hope you guys enjoy this journey as much as i enjoy writing it <3

if you enjoyed, i cannot stress enough how much comments mean to me (the literal world)!!! as do kudos and bookmarks and yadada.

love u all, and ill see u next update !!

the fic playlist
pinterest moodboard

The Night We Met

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's moments before Will sets foot into the Dining Hall that he realises how absolutely and entirely *reckless* his role in all of this is.

An arranged marriage was one thing, a *common* and *realistic* thing, but to act as a spy wasn't even in the same *realm*. If it had been anyone else, the Prince thinks, it wouldn't be so viciously awful an idea. But this isn't anyone else, and *he* isn't anyone else, and this just *is*.

The overhead chandeliers burn a bright orange, casting both Will and his attending valet in gold. It causes the detailing in the Prince's waistcoat to shimmer, and his eyes to deepen in their blue.

Murmuring can be heard through the roof-height doors, and Will distantly wonders if his heartbeat can be, also.

"You'll be okay, Will," Matthew whispers, leaning in just enough to slip the sapphire ring he had found into the Prince's pocket. "Put it on, and I'll be there in spirit."

Reaching into his waistcoat's pocket, Will grabs ahold of the silver ring, inspecting it with wide eyes. He'd gotten it, many a moon ago, from a Lord he had little to do with. He'd never worn it. Looking hesitantly into Matthew's eyes, he nods, manoeuvring it onto the fourth finger of his right hand. It's a comforting weight, and it shines in the chandelier's light. He suppresses a sigh.

He and his valet had already said their goodbyes, long before they'd arrived before the Dining Hall's doors. It still pains him to know this will be the last he'll see of the Omega for months, if not years, to come.

Matthew inclines his head. "It's been an honour to be in your service, Your Highness."

Will knows that if he speaks, it'll hardly be more than a tearful sob, so instead, he nods. Sharp and quick, but acknowledging the man and his comforts over the years.

The valet smiles, and the Prince attempts to.

Matthew wraps his hands around the golden handle of the doors, looking to Will once with a supportive, regretful look, before opening them wide.

It's hard to hear beyond the *thump, thump, thump* of the Prince's heart, but he knows the room's gone silent with his arrival from the electricity in the air alone. Scanning the table, he feels a breath of relief when he doesn't find his future husband, or any members of his entourage. He knows everyone sat at the table; Lords and noblemen of whom he's at least had a conversation or two with.

None of which he holds to any degree of fondness or respect.

At the head of the table sits two empty chairs, and with a jolt of recognition, Will realises that *he* is supposed to take up one of those spaces. The King sits on the opposite end of the absurdly long table, prim and proper in his tall chair, akin to a throne, but not as intricate.

Social etiquette and Princely training has him bowing more due to muscle memory than anything, but he does so nonetheless.

Conversations start up again, and he releases a breath he hadn't a clue he was holding.

A servant at his side extends his arm for Will to take, guiding him the short distance to the head of the table, allowing the Prince to sit himself in his chair, attempting to get comfortable. It's an impossible task, but one to soothe his nerves nonetheless. His left hand moves to brush against the ring Matthew had given to him, and his muscles loosen just so.

"Your Highness!" The Lord to his right exclaims, entirely too loud given the conversations being had around him. His full cheeks are flushed, exasperated with sweat as he claps his beefy hand against Will's shoulder. "Oh, what a pleasant celebration this is! The uniting of two of the nation's largest Kingdoms, why, isn't it wonderful?"

Despite everything, Will manages a pleasant smile, nodding with little enthusiasm. "Quite wonderful indeed, my Lord."

"Oh, you always were such a *darling* young man, it's a shame to see you leave this Castle," the Lord to his left holds a hand over her heart, painted lips downturned into a dramatic frown. "The peasants and servants have always been so fond of your leadership, however brief."

Considering the importance and severity of this event, Will can't help but find it entirely *odd* how regular it all seems. Similar to any other Dinner party, except for the set of the Prince's shoulders and the pain he feels within. It feels as if it's a form of torture, more than any celebration for himself.

"Forgive the subject, Your Highness," the third nobleman on his right whispers, loud enough for all to hear, "But it is quite unfortunate, who you're being wed to. I've heard only the most *dastardly* things about him."

The woman to the gossiping Lord's left hits his shoulder with a gloved hand, disapproval written all over her features. "*James,* you shouldn't speak of such things at this table," she hisses, glaring daggers at her spouse.

Will raises his hands, placating with a nervous smile, "Madame, it is quite alright. I'm aware of the rumours surrounding His Majesty, it is no subject of distaste."

She doesn't seem appeased, but his words seem to rile up the others at either side of the Prince.

"Is it true that he eats the hearts of his enemies?"

“Did he really kill an orphan girl because she was seen near the Palace?”

“What about his supposed deal with the Devil? Gods above, how *despicable.*”

“I have never met the man,” Will is quick to exasperate, each word from the Lords surrounding him sending him further into his pit of worry and despair. He’d never been one for social settings, however, always this side of too awkward and *kind* compared to the rich and noble Lords he was surrounded with. “I know little more than you all do on such topics. Please, let's discuss brighter and better things, my Lords.”

They all have the audacity to look somewhat chastised and ashamed, except for the woman who had spoken earlier, who gives him a look of pity.

“Whatever the case, I wish only for your happiness, Your Highness,” she inclines her head, and he gives her what he hopes to be a convincing smile. Judging by her barely-repressed grimace, it doesn’t pass.

Will looks down at his place, attempting a sense of solitude, but a hushed silence overtakes the room, and his heart stutters where it sits in his chest. He swallows around a dry throat, anticipating whatever is to come. Whatever his *duty* demands he partake in.

“His Majesty has arrived,” the doorman expresses, his voice trembling with apparent fear. His forehead shines with sweat in the overhead lights, but he moves to open the door nonetheless, and Will’s stomach stumbles to the carpet.

The King of Diabolus is, all things considered, the most striking man Will has ever laid eyes upon.

His hair falls over his head as if a stubborn mix between both brunette and blonde; cut short and ragged, the light catching upon his head like a mock of a halo where there is nothing holy in sight. Chiselled cheekbones, sharp enough to cut steel, and lips set into a firm line of neutrality. His eyes search the room with prompt distaste, analysing, with cruelty hidden in their brown depths. He looks weathered in a way one could only describe as elegant, with lines of age and wisdom etched into his sharp features. His scent is low, likely suppressed, but the hint of gunpowder mixed with molasses edges at the tip of Will’s nose.

All that the Prince can think is how this man will single-handedly destroy his life in the blink of an eye, and his only response will be to smile at the destruction he caused.

Will isn’t aware that everyone around him has stood to bow until those harsh, entirely too *knowing* brown eyes fall on his own. They spark with something the Prince can’t place, causing his breath to still in his throat and his heart to skip a beat.

He stands, too abrupt to be formal nor polite, before falling into a deep bow. He winces at the scrape of his chair, squeezing his eyes shut in a mix of embarrassment and lack of self-preservation. All he can hope for is a hint of mercy from the King, and forgiveness for his clear rudeness.

And for His Majesty to have met his eyes, and wanted nothing at all to do with him beyond this Dinner.

As soon as the door had opened to the admittedly pitiful Dining Hall, Hannibal Lecter knew he had found his soulmate.

One look from the meek, utterly *devastating* man, and his heart tugged with such a force, he almost had to take a step back. Eyes bright with intelligence and splashed with bright blue, paired with such a youthful and charming face, Hannibal finds, is just too much *perfection* for him to handle.

If he was at all a weaker man, he'd have fallen onto his knees, Alpha or not.

However, he is nothing if not strong. His expression doesn't once shift from that of neutrality, not in the slightest betraying his inner thoughts of showering this Beta with courting gifts and adoration.

"Your Majesty," The King of Cervus straightens, a cold but sociable smile resting on his wrinkled features. "It is such a delightful and momentous occasion to have you wed my dearest son."

Everyone else in the room straightens, said son doing so moments after everyone else.

Hannibal, for his part, does not smile at that.

"It is my pleasure," Hannibal inclines his head in return, finally allowing a hint of a smile to grace his lips. Even with the room so packed with scents as it is, the Prince's threadbare one is easy to pick apart from the rest. Timbre, intertwined with the faint smell of sea salt. *Home.*

Although not being able to visually see Beverly, Jimmy and Brian at his back, he is all too aware of the bristling humour they exude. They're likely entirely bemused by the intricate changes of their King's posture and niceties. He'll have to pretend to chastise them later, he internally muses.

A servant extends his arm for Hannibal to take, but he waves him off, more than happy to seat himself.

Walking towards the Prince, he watches his three companions – technically his inner circle – take seats near where he is to sit, at the head of the table. He'll never admit the comfort of that, but it's there in the easing of his shoulders.

When he reaches the head of the table and the Prince, he doesn't take out his chair immediately.

He drops to a knee, takes the hand closest to him in his own, and lifts the knuckles to brush his lips against. Soft gasps can be heard amongst the dramatic Lords and noblemen, but Hannibal heeds them no mind.

“I am so very pleased to make your acquaintance, Your Highness,” he mutters against the surprisingly rough skin of his soulmate’s hand, rubbing his thumb over the splits upon them.

When he looks up, he expects to see an expression of pleased surprise and a dusting of pink across supple cheeks.

What he doesn’t expect, not in the slightest, is what he receives.

Will Graham has never, not once in his life, been so full of spite and distaste.

The King – *kneeling,* the buffoon – looks up to him with such a charming and taken expression that the Prince can’t help but furrow his brows and frown. Of all the possible first greetings he’d imagined earlier; a swift stab to the heart, an immediate kiss, a furious rant – this is quite possibly *worse*.

“Sit, Your Majesty,” Will requests, sounding all too uncomfortable and put-off. He shifts in his seat and quickly slips his hand from the King’s grasp, holding it to his chest protectively.

To make such a show of their meeting is to hold a possessive claim over himself, Will thinks, anger boiling his blood. It’ll make it all the worse when Will expresses his wishes, expresses how little he wants to do with the murderous, apparently *hellish* man.

Seating himself, the King leans forward in the hopes of catching the Prince’s gaze once more, to little luck. “I apologise for offending you, Your Highness,” he amends, voice raspy with that unique accent. It softens some of his syllables, accentuates others – all Will can think is how he instantly despises it.

“It is not offence, Your Majesty, merely dislike,” Will supplies, tone bitter and *foolish*, considering the reputation the King does indeed have. Maybe death would, perhaps, be better than a life beside this man, Will thinks. He doesn’t retract the insult.

The King’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise, but his mouth settles into a pleased smirk. “My apologies for being mistaken, then, my Prince.”

“Your Highness will suffice,” Will instantly corrects, shooting the man beside him a distrustful look. When he locks onto brown eyes, he forces himself to look away with haste, lest he lose his soul to them.

If any of the Lords of noblemen are listening to their discussion, they make no comment. The lights above continue to shine gold amongst the room, and the scent of roast begins to fill the space. Will’s stomach growls despite itself, and he flushes.

“Do they not feed you regularly, in your Kingdom?” The King inquires, with just enough amusement in his tone to signify it as nothing more than a jest. “You will not find such a practice occurring within my own.”

“You find yourself in good humour, despite the situation,” Will folds his arms over his chest, despite the act being *entirely* improper, “I cannot say the same.”

“And here I thought I was saving yourself from starvation,” the King chides, tilting his head to further observe the Prince.

“I find myself to be quite safe, even more so when not in your presence, Your Majesty.” Will huffs, indignant, looking down at his plate as if it had personally harmed him.

“I haven’t a clue what my reputation is, in Cervus,” the King hums, his calculating gaze analysing Will’s side profile with a gaze that heats the Prince’s skin where it brushes. “But it seems to have you in quite a state, for you to be so brazen with your statements.”

Will stiffens, his arms falling from his chest to rest on his thighs, his fists tightening at the cloth around his knees. He doesn’t dignify the King’s words with a response.

The doors open once more to a multitude of servants, all carrying trays upon trays of steaming food. Will finds himself relaxing with the reprieve, no longer having to hold such a strenuous conversation with the Alpha at his side.

Roasts of many meats and produce are placed across the centre of the Dining table, wafting with steam and crisped to perfection. Servants begin to serve portions on everyone’s plate, Will murmuring a soft *thank you* as his own is filled. The servant serving him gives the Prince a small, appreciative smile, to which Will returns with more warmth than any he’s given to the Lords.

“I’ve never seen so many Servants in one room,” the King to Will’s right comments off-handedly, picking up his fork and analysing the food in front of him with a hint of disdain.

Will’s brow raises at that. “You don’t own many Servants?”

“We don’t *own* anyone,” the King replies, the disdain now more of a *fact* than a *hint.* He shoots a look at the Prince, the first to be in the realm of negativity. “I find the practice… uncouth. I prefer the concept of free range.”

Taking a bite of the roast chicken on his plate, Will hums around his mouthful, disinterested in inquiring about the term. It matters little to him, in the end.

After swallowing, Will steels his resolve, exhales slowly, and looks up to the King. His words are blessedly steady as he says, “I have no interest in this being anything but a political campaign. I do not wish to spend any unnecessary time with you, and I do not wish to be made aware of any of your…” he rolls his tongue around his mouth, searching for the right word, “*customs*.”

The King blinks. Once. Twice. Brings his fork to his mouth, chews, swallows.

“It’s a shame that you have really no say in the matter, then, isn’t it?”

Will scoffs a rude laugh at that, uncaring of the supposed *peace* he was supposed to enter this marriage with. He’d agreed to be a spy and a husband; nothing more, nothing less. Nothing was ever agreed upon, considering his conduct or behaviour.

“If you should at all force my hand in *anything,* Your Majesty, you will find I will not be good company,” Will challenges, a thin smile on his face that threatens violence more than kindness.

The King’s own lips tilt into a reticent smirk; a hint of malice in the angle of them. “Perhaps. Or perhaps we may come to be good companions, and you will find happiness by my side. Who is to know, except for the Gods above?”

“I don’t *believe* in anything above,” Will grits out, “Nor do I find you in the slightest bit interesting enough to willingly spend time with.”

The King’s smirk deepens. “You will.”

They continue their meal in tense silence, not speaking a word until a Lord to Will’s right attempts to start-up a conversation once more, beady eyes flicking to the King with every word out of his thin-lipped mouth. “This is a wonderful feast, Your Highness.”

“I can take no credit for it, I’m afraid,” Will smiles, gesturing to the Servants standing along the walls of the room. “Our Cooks and Servants are the ones to be celebrated.”

“You have always treated them with such respect, even considering your difference in rank,” one of the noblewomen shakes her head, fork paused halfway to her mouth. “Truly, you will make a generous King one day.”

Will bows his head, his cheeks dusting with red at the compliment. He’d never done well with praise of any sort – being raised without it has caused him to become somewhat unused to it in any capacity beyond polite and insincere comments made in passing.

Dinner passes quickly, despite the nervous energy Will knows he must exude like a perfume. His scent, even if it’s difficult for him to pick up, seems tinged with bitterness. He can’t find it in himself to care too much, and soon enough, plates are cleared and wine is poured.

The King of Cervus rises, goblet of wine in his hand and arm outstretched in a toasting gesture. A hush falls over the room, the ageing man smiling as he announces, “To a union of Kingdoms, and of men! Congratulations on your joining, Prince and King, and to joyous years to come!”

Echoes of clapping and added words fall to deaf ears.

Will wants to vomit. He wants to stand on shaky legs and *run,* run as far as they can take him, out to the fields – hell, even further. He wants to find Matthew and shake him, get on his knees and *beg* the Omega to run away with him, to find a happy life together, hidden and

peaceful and *real.* Not a fake life, like the one Will has always lived, and will continue to do so under the guise of this sham of a marriage. A real, true, *life.*

Instead, he raises his glass, and toasts to his own demise, with a shaky smile and an even shakier resolve.

The wine is cool where it slides down his throat; Will's well aware of the proper etiquette in tasting one so expensive and vibrant, but he finds it little matters, not when he desperately wants to get lost in it. He knows, despite all his wants, that he can't afford to be inebriated, but *oh*, he wishes.

The King to his side shoots a glare the Prince's way, anything but amused. "You do not care to treat your wine with respect?"

Will finishes off the glass in one go, and places it on the table. He doesn't look to the man as he simply says, "No. I do not."

Silence resumes once more, somehow even more tense – any sense of the King's wishes to be chivalrous gone within the space of one meal. Will can only hope the silence continues for the rest of his days.

"Once this… *celebration,*" The King grimaces at the term, as if it is anything *but,* "Has concluded, the carriage will be ready. We will depart as soon as able."

Will stares down his empty goblet, watching the condensation form drops and run down its intricate, frosted side. His tongue is heavy when he asks, "When will the papers be signed?"

King Hannibal Lecter of the Diabolus Kingdom furrows his brows, and Prince Will Graham of the Kingdom of Cervus realises it all too late.

The King's words are slow, calculating, when he says simply, as if Will should've *known,* "They were signed two weeks ago."

He isn't thinking, not when he stands shakily, and not when he meekly says, "Excuse me," and rushes for the doors.

He isn't thinking, when his chest seems to cave in, his breaths harsh and harried and *painful,* so painful; the daggers twisting again, and again, and again.

He isn't thinking when he rushes down empty hallways, *he isn't thinking* when he shoves open the large, front doors leading to the front gardens, he isn't *thinking* when he falls to his knees beside one of the trees and *sobs.*

Each tear that falls down his ruddied cheeks feels like another stain on his soul. Feels like a piece of him that has been torn off, tossed into the wind with careless ignorance. Uncaring of *him, his feelings, his wants and needs and –*

"That was a pretty dramatic exit, Your Highness."

A sarcastic, feminine voice calls out, the lamps sitting around the cobblestone path to the Castle casting shadows across the grass. He's grateful that the tree he chose is at least somewhat hidden, away from curious glances. Well, for the *most* part.

"Sorry, *who* are you?" Will asks, voice cracking and soft and so completely *weak* he wants to berate himself. The voice in his head, the one that sounds suspiciously like his Father's, does the job for him.

The woman – an Alpha, by the dominating scent of ink against parchment – stops mere feet away from where he's sat, his back against the trunk of the tree and his knees bent against his chest. Her arms are folded over chest. Her dress is flowy, almost fey; a deep purple, only just opaque enough to cover her undergarments. The lamps overhead decorates her face in vicious contrasts, her elegant features almost otherworldly.

"I'm Beverly Katz," she introduces, crouching down and extending her hand. Will is wary, but he takes it nonetheless. "I came with *His Majesty."*

She adopts a mocking tone with the title, and Will starts despite himself. To disrespect a *King* so blatantly is near-unheard of, but he doesn't dispute it when she moves to sit beside him. There's something distinctly safe about her, a sense of security settling in Will's anxiety.

It's silent for a moment, except for the distant sound of early-Autumn cicadas and an owl, every so often.

"I got married off, two *weeks* before I was even made aware of this stunt," Will whispers, head falling back and hitting the bark of the oak tree, uncaring of pieces that may stick to his curls. Uncaring of how his words will be received by the Alpha.

Beverly looses a low whistle, eyebrows arching when she turns to look at the Prince. "We, well, The *King* thought you were made aware of the marriage when he signed off on it. I doubt he would've done such a thing otherwise."

"You say that," Will scoffs, unthinking of his blazon disrespect of his *husband,* "But he seems just as domineering and *awful* as every other powerful Alpha I've met."

The woman's smirk deepens, openly impressed with Will's assessment. "He's definitely powerful, and cruel when needed – but not like this. He believes fully in free will, and the right to choices in life. It would go against his very morals."

"Perhaps he hasn't any," Will snarks, knowing his anger is misplaced. It should, really, be directed at his Father – who had knowingly entered Will into a situation he hadn't a clue of, hadn't been made *ready* of. Forcing his hand, wavering off Will's life, without a single care for the fallout.

Beverly shrugs, nodding lightly. "You'll make your own assessments, I suppose. Considering you're going to be spending a *lot* more time with him."

"I don't want anything at all to do with the King," Will admits, voice strengthening and tone hardening, "If I can do as little as possible in regards to associating with him, then I will

certainly do so. He doesn't interest me in the slightest, and I detest men like him. He will do well to stay *far* away from me."

"What has made you hate him? You haven't even *met* prior to this evening," she shakes her head, incredulous, a furrow forming between her sculpted brows.

Will wraps his arms tighter around his chest. "I am aware that rumours hold little credit, but the ones regarding his Majesty are so wicked and astounding that I wonder to their origins. I'm sure that he has mistresses and concubines ready to be chosen at his whim; he can enjoy them and regard me as little more than a stranger."

Beverly doesn't respond, but she appears both confused and disheartened – as if Will's internal struggles affect her deeper than she can explain.

Digging the palms of his clammy hands into his eyes, Will mumbles, "I apologise for my rudeness – and how improper I've been towards you. Please, don't let this introduction dampen any future interactions."

"Your situation calls for you to throw a fit of rage and cause chaos, much less be *impolite.* Please, Your Highness, I hold absolutely no grudges against you," she chuckles, placing a well meaning hand on his shoulder, squeezing it. He won't admit how the touch grounds him. "Anyways, I can already tell we'll form a great friendship."

Will's soft smile comes easily at that, his tears dried and only his hands trembling. "Thank you, Miss Katz."

"Beverly," she waves off, as if the formal title offends her. "Please, Your Highness."

"Will, then," he extends, his smile the first completely authentic one of the evening. "Call me Will. I've never been one for formalities."

"Great friendship indeed," Beverly chuckles, and Will can't help but join.

"Oh, Your Majesty, I *deeply* apologise – I swear he doesn't usually act so recklessly, my *Gods* –"

Hannibal raises a hand, straightening his back and directing an easy, polite smile around the silenced table. He doesn't understand their need to flounder and beg for his mercy – not when it is not theirs to earn.

If anything, Hannibal has only become more endeared to the curious Beta who has just fled his side.

"Do not worry yourself, Your Majesty, I am not angry in the slightest. Marriage is a terrifying prospect for anyone, let alone a Prince. Please, calm yourself," he commands the room like a

puppeteer would his puppet's strings, with ease and grace.

The King swipes his handkerchief against his sweaty forehead, a Servant at his side offering up a glass of iced water for the reddened man.

Hannibal takes another sip of his wine to hide his immensely pleased smile.

He'd hoped, of course, for his soulmate to be interesting. To have a keen sense of intellect, and an even keener humour and wit. This was more than he could have ever asked for – especially with the hatred burning in the younger man's eyes and words. It only encourages Hannibal further, makes him wish to court and gain the affections of the Prince with a much deeper ferocity.

The King always enjoys a challenge.

He watches Beverly whisper something to a Servant about needing air, before gracefully leaving the Dining Hall with silent, practised steps. No one bats an eye, and Hannibal is sure that she is going to quickly win over his anxious Prince.

The wine tastes infinitely better against his tongue, knowing that his plan has been set into motion.

Because Hannibal does, in fact, endorse the concept of free will and the freedom to do as one pleases. Meaning that he is fully within his rights to plan and prepare for his goal, and do everything within his power to reach it; any means necessary.

Even if that means an 'arranged' marriage, and crumbling this very Castle to the ground.

He can't wait to sip this very same wine, except with the cracked stone of these walls beneath his boots, and his soulmate at his side, a lit match in hand.

When he swallows, it's with a practised smile, and a twinkle in his eye.

The King of Diabolus is going to enjoy this very, *very* much.

Chapter End Notes

yes, this is more of a one-sided enemies to lovers, but i can't help but make hannibal whipped. if i didn't, it wouldn't really feel like him 3

if u enjoyed, please drop a comment, whether it be extremely short or extremely long!! all are appreciated and give me serotonin<3

the fic playlist
pinterest moodboard

Wait

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will doesn't say goodbye to his Father.

He doesn't say goodbye to anyone, in fact.

By the time that he's sitting in the carriage, Beverly wishing him a safe travel before moving to her own, the Dinner has just concluded. Swarms of Lords and the like spread across the Castle's entry like bees, or armies of ants.

They laugh, some having had too much wine, with wide grins and spread arms. Will thinks of the starving people, shivering along the streets of one of the poorer villages, miles and miles out.

The roast suddenly doesn't sit too well in his stomach.

Stars glisten against the black of night, white dots against the void; taunting. He's seen the way they reflect in dark eyes, how they appear almost like lit candles when seen in Matthew's. Will hopes, quiet and distant, that the Omega will be okay. Even though Matthew could hardly be considered as such – not a *'pure'* Omega, as if such a thing *existed,* he still went through the plights of any other.

Plights Will is eternally and forever grateful that he needn't ever experience.

A single lit lantern sits upon a hook attached to the carriage's roof, swinging slightly with the impatient movements of the horses. If the coachmen mistreat the animals, well, Will is certainly not one to look the other way.

The hint of gunpowder and molasses is the only warning Will gets, before an accented voice breaks the silence.

"I am pleased to see that you haven't run off too far, my Prince."

Glancing up at the open door, Will barely suppresses a groan when he sees a feline-like smirk and deep-brown eyes. The Prince instinctively shuffles over, his side pressing against the wall of the carriage and some stray curls brushing the small, frosted window. "Unfortunately, my escape would've been as good as announcing the beginning of a war."

"You believe there to be a war on the horizon?" The King asks, genuine curiosity in his tone as he crouches, before sitting opposite of Will. He brushes off invisible lint, before tilting his head. "That's a controversial statement, especially so for a Prince."

Will scoffs, leans back further against his cushion. "It's the *truth,* and I won't lie to the people. There's a war coming, and *this*," he gestures to himself, to the King, to the carriage at large, "Is just the beginning."

Conversations are being had outside – too muffled with the closed door for either Will or the King to catch any words. Will folds his arms over his chest.

“Why would I wish for a war against the very Kingdom my Husband is soon to rule?” The King inquires, and that, there, is the million dollar question. What *is* the King’s angle here? Wedding Will, wedding into Cervus’ lineage, the Kingdom as a whole – it isn’t *truly* to conquer or unify, is it?

Will hasn’t a clue. The noose around his throat tightens.

“If not you,” Will acquiesces, if only for a moment, “Then the Kingdoms of Porcus and Ligula. The Queens are – *were* – our only allies, but they have become cautious of any new agreements or discussions. Trade has been worrisome.”

“I’ve grown quite fond of the Queens,” the King muses, something sparking in his eyes, “Our relationship has grown in both strength and fondness this past year.”

Will sets his jaw, and decides that silence is for the best. No point in either getting into a fist fight with his *Husband* within hours of meeting, or running around each other in petty circles. He just turns and looks out of the window, watching as Lords walk along the gardens.

With a lurch, the carriage finally begins moving, and Will leans his temple against the chilly glass. The chill of Autumn has set in, and he finds his exhale forming a small, visible cloud. He allows just a hint of humour at the sight.

“I’m not very fond of your father,” the King muses, and Will struggles not to flinch at the mere mention of the man.

Instead, Will glares at the man in front of him, not quite meeting his inquisitive gaze. “He is a fine King, and I don’t think insulting your spouse’s family is how to go about winning a single ounce of my affections.”

The man hums, utterly and entirely amused by the Prince’s words. Will struggles not to shout any number of insults.

Will looks out the window once more, watching as the regal wealth of the Castle is replaced by lengths of dirt roads and village houses; unruly nature and resting farm animals. Dread threatens to swallow him whole, the reminders of the growing unhappiness of his people, and how he’s living them all behind.

Leaving his life *behind.*

“What place does Miss Katz have in your court?” Will finds himself asking, debating slapping himself for willingly sparking another conversation with the devilish King sat in front of him.

He decides against the act, on the basis that it’ll make him both look even more foolish than he likely already does, and that the pain isn’t worth it.

“Beverly is an incredibly influential Lord,” the King explains, folding his ankle over his knee. “And she is wonderfully intelligent when it comes to national and social affairs. I trust her guidance and insight with my life.”

Will had figured she must be a Lord of sorts, but to hear this man speak so fondly and kindly of her is like a shot to his stomach. His father never even praised *Crawford,* his right-hand man.

Squeezing his hands together, the dim light of the lantern displaying the reddened, frost-bitten ends of his fingers, Will nods. A multitude of other questions threaten to flood his mind; such as speaking of the rumours, the King’s alleged death toll, his previous suitors. Instead, Will remains silent.

The ride continues for countless hours, the two only sharing words when the King offers Will some water from a pouch, and a spare bag with cookies in them. The Prince only accepts the water.

It’s only when Will can just see the first towers marking Diabolus’ territory, that the King asks his own question.

“Why are you so devoutly against any kind of relationship? Even one purely platonic seems to be completely against your wishes,” he muses, studying the outline of Will’s face with intelligent eyes. When Will swallows, his gaze darts to the bob of his Adam’s apple. Will pretends not to notice.

His answer is an honest one. “I do not wish to ‘get to know’ any Alphas of your kind, knowing the ones I do. Your tendency for violence leaves a sour taste in my mouth.”

An amused chuckle falls from the Alpha’s lips, and his scent tinges with a hint of spice. “I suppose I can understand, however, I don’t believe myself to be any more violent than the other Kingdoms. Perhaps even less so.”

“Respectfully,” Will starts, not sounding respectful in the slightest, “I don’t believe you.”

“I don’t expect your trust, my Prince, but there will come a time wherein I’ve earned it. That day will be a celebrated one.”

Will doesn’t answer, and instead, closes his eyes and leans against the side of the carriage.

Slumber comes easy, its grasp wrapping around the Prince’s limbs and taking him under

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As the Prince’s soft snores fill the carriage, Hannibal can’t help but admire the man.

His delicate, chocolate curls splay against the wall, perfect for the Alpha to grasp and twist around his fingers as he pleases. Chapped lips opened just slightly, allowing gentle and slow

intakes and exhales of breaths. Nose dipped in pink from the cold, cheeks brushed with the chill's soft caresses.

Oh, Hannibal knows, this man was made for him. Every inch, every word, every snarl and insult. He can't wait for the day that the Prince breaks, and falls into his arms; the day that he realises that Hannibal is *Home.*

The urge to brush his hand down Will's cheek is a strong one, but the King isn't revered for no reason.

He knows patience like an old friend, and he is in no position to forget it now, however tempting the feeling may be.

Loosing a soft, pleased sigh, Hannibal directs his gaze out of the window, watching as the edges of sunrise cusp the horizon. The long ride had gone surprisingly quick, but the Beta before him has a way of inhibiting Hannibal's senses.

His villages, so unlike the unruly, neglected ones of Cervus, explode with life and colour. Banners blow in the wind, and even though the streets are barren at this early hour, a sense of humanity floods them.

While Hannibal holds little respect for anyone except for his closest circle, he knows what it takes to be a good King – for he cannot be anything *but* the best. He would never allow himself to fall behind any of the other Kingdoms, be that in his citizens' happiness and wellbeing, or the ruthlessness of his reputation.

He hopes that even *this* is symbolic enough of Hannibal's supposed niceties to win his Prince over, just enough for the plan to further in its steps.

His heart thrums like a hummingbird's in his chest, and a smile graces the King's lips.

Hannibal hadn't been lying when he'd said his relationship with the Queens of Porcus has strengthened. While a part of his long-term ideal, the two are quite formidable and intelligent rulers – ones Hannibal will much rather have on his side, when the war eventually hits the nation.

The thought of war has the King looking back to his sweet Prince, watching the steady falls of his chest as he breathes. Will was entirely correct when speaking of the upcoming war; his insights startling even Hannibal in their keen intellect and understanding. The King wonders what has been hidden from him by his Father; the untold statistics or communications passed among the Kingdoms.

He has his fair share to tell his Husband, and maybe, just maybe, that'll also chime in his favour.

The Prince murmurs something under his breath, a small furrow forming between his brows, his lips tilting down in an unbelievable endearing frown.

Patience, Hannibal must remind himself, *is a virtue.*

Since when were you at all moral? Since when do you stoop down to such a mortal way of thinking? Another, distinctly more taunting voice in his head chimes. He doesn't listen to it.

A particularly harsh dip in the road has the Prince letting out a low, unhappy whine, before the backs of his hands move to rub at his eyes.

Hannibal silently mourns the loss of the Prince's peace.

Letting out a small yawn, Will moves to stretch, before he seems to remember himself and his situation. Wincing his eyes open, his shoulders deflate when his gaze meets Hannibal's. It takes everything within the older man not to smile.

"Are we there yet?" The Prince asks, voice verging on annoyed, considering his rude awakening. He blinks against the barest rays of sunlight, looking ruffled and sleepy.

Hannibal *aches* to hold the Beta in his arms and brush away all of his worries, telling him that he's *there,* now, and everything will be okay.

Instead, he casts the man an amused look. "As you can see, we're right at the Palace gates."

Will looks out of the window. Looks to Hannibal. Looks out of the window once more. Glares at Hannibal.

"Your humour is severely lacking," the Prince hisses, holding eye contact – something he's yet to do. Hannibal can't help the flare of pride that stokes his stomach alight.

"Not unlike your intelligence, it so appears," Hannibal challenges, tilting his head when Will sits straighter, as if doing so will defend his pride. The King is fully aware how he's playing with fire, speaking to Will in this way – but, he thinks, this is also a *challenge.* He won't settle for less, and stirring up the Beta in this way will certainly prove that he is anything but.

The salt in the Prince's scent sharpens, and Hannibal can feel the smallest of pleased purrs rumble in his chest.

"I find that my intelligence more than suffices, Your Majesty, considering I have yet to jump out of this moving carriage, despite how I *oh* so wish to."

"Self-control is hardly a display of intellect, rather, a display of personal strength."

"I beg to differ, considering all that's preventing me from punching you right this *moment* is my *knowledge* of outcomes and the world at large. If it weren't for my level of understanding, I'm afraid, Your Majesty, that you'd have an extremely bent nose as of current."

Such a violent thing, Hannibal ponders, his heart stuttering in his chest, *such a perfect thing.*

"Threatening a King – your newlywed *Husband* – isn't something I'd consider intelligent, my Prince," Hannibal presses, voice low and hinting at danger.

Will's cheeks deepen in colour, his mouth opening and closing around silent syllables. *Caught, like a fish on a hook.*

The Prince manages a stilted, “It’s hardly a *threat,*” before resolutely looking to his fist-whitened knuckles, still cracked from the sparring match he’d had two days prior.

“I’m not in the least bit offended,” Hannibal amends, he, too, looking at the Prince’s knuckles, “I find your courage and honesty refreshing, if not misguided. You have no need to fight with me, and I believe you’ll find yourself much happier in Diabolus than Cervus.”

“That’s an outrageously unfound and bold claim,” Will murmurs, voice husky from sleep.

Hannibal smiles. “And yet, one I believe to be true.”

The sun has risen past the horizon, now, its rays casting both the Prince and the King in gentle hues of orange and yellow. The blue in Will’s eyes now shines a captivating cerulean, and Hannibal’s a caramel.

Both men fall silent, this time being the least tense of all the quiets thus far, the beauty of nature filling in the blanks of their thoughts. Hannibal’s eyes remain on the planes of the younger man’s face; the slope of his nose, the dip of his cupid’s bow. Will doesn’t notice – his own gaze caught on the gates looming up ahead.

The Palace.

By the time the carriage has stopped moving, the noose around Will’s neck has tightened to the point that he’s near gasping for breath.

Even through the small window, the Palace looms over the two men like a giant *mass,* so unbelievably glorious that Will’s eyes feel as though they could pop out at a moment’s notice. The contrast to his own Castle – *bleak, gold, commercialised* – and *this* is uncanny. Spellbinding. Breathtaking. Any list of adjectives that Will is in no condition to name.

There’s no word to describe it other than Gothic.

Towers decorate the Palace in thin spires, pointed at the tops and imposing, with spikes decorating the base. Ivy coats the main entrance wall, the bricks dark and grimy from centuries of use and wear. It looks like it should belong to some mythical creature, the architecture inherently Vampiric in its design.

Will isn’t aware of how devoutly amazed he looks until a low chuckle emanates from the man still sitting in front of him.

Shooting him a glare, Will moves to open the carriage door and get the hell out, when a grip on the collar of his shirt pulls him back harshly. Blinking away his shock, he tries to wrestle against the tight fist, but it’s a fruitless effort.

“Let go of me!” He hisses, moving to elbow the King, before that, too, is intercepted.

“I’m not going to harm you, but I *do* insist you listen to what I’m going to say,” the King soothes, his voice closer to Will’s ear than the Beta was at all expecting. His breath brushes his cartilage, the heat of the other man’s body leaving the hairs on the back of the Prince’s neck to stand on end.

“Get to it,” Will huffs, aware of his position and the obvious strength the other man exudes.

Giving one last tug to the scruff of his shirt, the King hums. He doesn’t let go, but he does loosen his grip slightly.

“You are not a prisoner here. You may leave the Palace at your own accord, however, I insist you take someone with you – your Kingdom is not looked upon fondly in Diabolus,” he warns, and Will inhales sharply. “Whatever you may think of me, I do not wish to have your blood on my hands, my Prince.”

Will has a half a mind to tell him to stop referring to him as such. He doesn’t.

“The only expectations I have of you are to attend Dinner each evening, and to attend any events I inform you of. That is all.”

Swallowing around the thin, chilled air, Will doesn’t answer.

The King tugs at his collar once more, leaning in until his lips brush the edge of Will’s ear. His voice is low and commanding, the closest to kingly he’s sounded since they’ve met, when he asks, “Am I clear?”

“I understand, Your Majesty,” Will grates out, the words paining him, but leaving his mouth nonetheless.

He nearly falls forward with how swiftly the King lets go of his shirt, just catching himself by placing his palms against the door.

It opens.

There goes my dignity, Will distantly thinks, embarrassment flooding him entirely, *Gone as quickly as I’ve mustered it.*

Just as he swears he’s about to get a faceful of gravel, a hand around his nape saves him from the misery. For a single second, that is, until a soft thumb presses against his scent gland, and his body just.

Shuts down.

It takes everything within the Prince not to let out the whine that begs to be released, or to tilt his neck the way his body begs of him.

He remains very, *very,* still, hovering over the ground.

“Oh my *gods,*” he breathes, eyes squeezed shut and words breathy, “Let go of me, you *imbecile*!”

For once, his words are heeded, and the grip around his nape releases. What Will hadn't, realised, in his haze of stupidity, is that the act has caused his *body* to be released, too.

He groans, his head smacking against the floor, causing a throb of pain to start in his skull. The palms of his hands feel like they've been grated, too, likely red-raw from his attempt to brace for impact. He makes no move to sit up, instead, embracing the end of his life with open arms.

"Will! Gods above, are you *alright*?" Beverly's shocked voice cries out, bootfalls against gravel following soon after, until a shadow is cast against his frame. "Why'd you let go of him?" She asks, seemingly directing her ire to the King, instead.

The Prince can practically hear how the man's voice drips with humour as he merely replies, "I did as he asked, and I am nothing if not accommodating."

Not responding to the barb, Beverly leans down, rubbing her hand against Will's shoulder, before moving to help him up. "*You* need to stop being so dramatic," she pulls at once of his curls, and Will finally lifts his head to deliver her a flat look.

She just smiles, neither out of pity or cruelty, before she holds out her hands for him to take.

He does, silently standing, with only a slight wince as the world seems to tilt on its side for a second. Beverly wraps her arm around his waist, and Will lets his head hang between his shoulders.

"Let me look," the King insists, moving around the two, "I'm sure it's nothing more than a bruise."

Will flinches away from the other man's touch, but the King continues to move away the Beta's curls, brows furrowed as he brushes his thumb against the side Will had hit his head.

It's really not so painful, in hindsight, but the Prince can't help the small intake of breath as the King's thumb brushes his aching temple. A few seconds later, the older man takes a step back, the smallest of smirks on his face as he merely says, "Just a bruise."

"I appreciate your diagnosis, Doc," Will barbs, but it's Beverly who laughs and starts dragging him towards the Palace's entry.

She leans in, her voice a quiet whisper when she explains, "He actually *is* a Doc. Trained in more fields than I have fingers. He's a marvel to the doctors of the Kingdom, and even nationally."

Will's brows raise, and even *he's* not distasteful enough to ignore the hint of proud surprise that sparks in the back of his mind. A King who'd studied a particular field is unheard of – when Will had mentioned his interest in treating animals, his father had told him to never speak of such inane desires. That it was *unbecoming.*

"That's…" Will trails off, the pain ebbing enough for him to stop, and register his surroundings.

Oh.

People flood the grounds just beyond the Palace fences, pushing against the thin black spikes protecting the building and people within. Many hold placards high in the air, pushing against one another with anger and spite written all over their faces and attitudes.

Will's heart stutters where it beats in his chest when his eye catches on a few.

Send The Barbarian Back!

The King Needs A Friend, Not A Fiend!

Burn Cervus To The Ground!

His eyes go wide, his breath halting where it sits dormant in his throat. His hands clench around nothing, and without a word, he pulls away from the physical support of Beverly, and *watches.*

Their scream has increased tenfold, now that Will's attention has caught on the crowd – one or two even hold torches lit aflame. They wave, taunting the Prince in their movement, a threat if he's ever seen one. The morning has well and truly begun, and the sun only strengthens their dominating presence.

What the King had said about his Kingdom '*not looked upon fondly'* was an understatement.

Will was expecting an insult on the village streets, every so often. An increase in price for goods, the times he might wish to shop around.

He hadn't expected literal *torches* and threats to destroy his Kingdom.

A voice is calling his name – his *real* name – but he can't seem to latch onto it, can't seem to set himself straight once more.

"*Kill the Prince!"* They're chanting. "*Kill the Prince! Kill the Prince! Kill the Prince!*"

His inhales have transitioned to something more akin to *gasps,* the backs of his eyes burning, his chest filled with fear and a homesickness he can't quite place, and the *noose, it's going to hang him –*

"*Will*!"

Hands on his cheeks, forcing his gaze away from the protestors, brushing the darkened skin beneath his eyes.

The King.

"We're going *inside,*" he seethes, his hands only falling when Will gives one sharp, distinct nod.

He can't remember when Beverly fell back, likely to alert the King himself. He isn't sure how long he stared out into the crowd, falling apart, panic settling in. All he knows is that now he's being dragged through the obscenely large doors, one of the King's hands sitting between his shoulder blades and the other calling over a Servant.

The heavy doors are shut behind them by two doormen, and Will can finally *breathe.*

"What," he swallows around the dryness in his mouth, the fire in his stomach, "What are they –"

But the King's talking to a Servant in hushed, deliberately quiet words, and Will suddenly remembers exactly, where, he's been sent to live.

This is *Diabolus.* He's spent his entire life overhearing stories of how nasty and vicious its citizens are, how King Lecter rules with an iron fist and blood on his crown. How it's a nightmarish Kingdom with terrible relations and even worse customs.

Oh, he's been *stupid,* so *idiotic* in the brief fearlessness he'd felt on the trip here.

He thinks of Matthew, and what they'd be doing was he home, and he wasn't married to an unholy man. If they'd be sparring, or if Matthew would be sitting on the grass while Will cast his lure, knee-deep in the lake behind the Castle.

His heart aches with a sense of loss he still hasn't reckoned with. It continues to beat, he knows, because his mind continues to race, but it feels like someone's clawed into his chest and pulled out the organ for nothing but their own amusement. As if the blood on their hands and the lack of it in Will's body is a *game.*

"I'm going to be sick," is all Will manages to say, before he turns to one of the two stairs sitting in the foyer, and *runs.*

"Will!" Hannibal yells out, turning to run after the nauseous Beta, before Chiyoh grabs ahold of his wrist.

"You will *scare* him," she insists with a resolute shake of her head, undeterred by the fire in the Alpha's eyes. "Give him time. Abigail will tend to him – she's in the library."

Despite the near-irresistible urge in his chest to run after the Prince and hold him while he crumbles, he remains where he is, pulling away from Chiyoh's hold with a short nod. She seems to relax at the agreement, folding her hands in front of her.

Where Cervus has Servants, Diabolus has nothing of the sort.

The people who work within the Palace are *paid,* and treated with the same levels of respect as any other villager or Lord.

As Hannibal sees it, there is no need for a social hierarchy: not if all of the people within his Kingdom are devout, and worship *him,* solely. God does not have favourites, he reasons, so why should he?

He's aware of how that doesn't apply to his close circle, how unfair his reasoning is and the lack of consistency within it. To that, he says, God also likes to break his own rules.

"The people are going to lose themselves in their hatred," Hannibal spits, glaring out of the stained glass window, decorating the raging villagers in a myriad of colours. None of them lessen the red in their eyes. "As am I, if this is not dealt with."

Chiyoh sets her jaw, gaze unrelenting as she argues, "If we escalate to force, so will they. The best option is to wait this out."

"Look at the consequences of that *option*," Hannibal waves his hand to the staircase, the image of Will's frozen and terrified frame stuck in his mind like a nail through parchment.

"If anything, this suits your agenda most," Chiyoh's voice has taken to a calm whisper, "He will not wish to leave the Palace for quite some time, and you'll be able to warm him to you. Is that not helpful to your cause?"

Hannibal doesn't respond, knowing that she has somewhat of a point – however manipulative it is.

Chiyoh places a hand on the dagger strapped to her thigh, a gift from the King himself when she'd killed his would-be assassin many a moon ago. Her voice is icy when she says, "Should they at all pose a physical risk to the Prince, there will be bloodshed. I assure you."

Shoulders falling just slightly, Hannibal nods, accepting the compromise for what it is.

"Arrange for more guards to line the gates," he orders, comforted in the fact that the woman before him is the strongest Beta he has ever known, both mentally and physically. "And I want one stationed outside of both my, and my Prince's, quarters."

The corner of Chiyoh's lips tilt upwards, but her voice is monotone as she says, "I will do my duty in protecting you and *your* Prince, Your Highness." She inclines her head, before walking away, likely to inform her guards of their orders.

Hannibal can't help but replay the way she said '*your* Prince', and how utterly right the words feel. One day, it'll be far more than an off-handed title.

Until then, the scraps will satiate the King.

Chapter End Notes

well...

thank you for the support so far!! every single comment means the world to me, and i'm so glad you guys are enjoying it!! <3<3<3 lots of love

the fic playlist
pinterest moodboard

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!